upon their perception of the comparative advantages in different situations, including rural and backward areas.

Wakf Properties

*312. KUMARI MAMTA BANERJEE : Will the Minister of WELFARE be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government are aware that the Wakf properties are being illegally sold and transferred throughout the country; and

(b) if so, the steps taken or proposed to be taken by the Government to save the Wakf properties?

THE MINISTER OF WELFARE (SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA) : (a) The Government have no information regarding illegal sale or transfer of Wakf properties except in respect of West Bengal. The Government of West Bengal have confirmed the receipt of complaints regarding mismanagement of Wakf properties and institution of a departmental enquiry to look into them. But the report of the departmental enquiry has not been received although there have been references in the Press about such a report and discussion of the matter in the State Legislative Assembly.

(b) Safeguards have been provided in the Wakf Act, 1995 to save Wakf properties from illegal sale/ transfer, vide Sections 51 and 52 of the said Act.

Monitoring of Foreign Aircrafts

*313. SHRI JAGAT VIR SINGH DRONA : Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that the Director General of Civil Aviation had been asked to strictly monitor the country's air space to prevent entry of foreign aircraft, violating accepted international norms and threatening the country's security;

(b) if so, whether the Government are aware of the fact that in June, 1996, two Pakistani Planes had entered in a very low range into Indian territory (Kargil area of Jammu and Kashmir) for the preparation of maps of Indian territory; and

(c) if so, the details of the protest made from Indian side and the response from Pakistan thereto?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION AND MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRI C.M. IBRAHIM) : (a) No, Sir.

(b) No, Sir.

(c) Does not arise.

Privatisation of Postal Services

*314. SHRI AMAR PAL SINGH : Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :

(a) whether any proposal is under consideration of the Government for privatisation of postal services as reported in the 'Economic Times' dated July 2, 1996;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the number of private agencies proposed to be licenced for the purpose; and

(d) which type of postal services are proposed to be assigned to these agencies?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA) : As mentioned briefly in the news items in Economic Times dated the 2nd July, 1996 the Department of Post, in order to provide basic postal facility like sale of stamps and stationery extensively, has been allowing licensed agents to operate under specified terms and conditions.

The following agency systems are presently in operation :

Licenced Postal Agency : This scheme, in operation since 1985, allows licensed agents to sell stamps and stationery and book registered articles. The agent is paid a percentage commission on the amount of stamps and stationery sold, and commission per registered article booked.

Keeping in view the staff opposition to the scheme, no new licence under this scheme is being issued since 1987. However, the agents given licences before the scheme was held in abeyance continue to operate.

Licenced Stamp Vendor: This scheme, introduced in 1969, was initially for headquarter towns of Heads of Postal Circles, and since 1983, is is extended to all areas. The scheme permits any individual, firm or society to take an agency for sale of stamps and stationery. STD/ISD/PCO booth holders are also eligible for this scheme.

Licence under this scheme is issued by the Head of Postal Division, subject to fulfilment of prescribed conditions. No Target is set for this purpose.

Panchayat Sanchar Sewa Yojana : This scheme, introduced in 1995, has been devised to provide basic postal services in areas not having such services and justifying opening of a post office. In this scheme, the Gram Panchayat of the Village where post office is justified is allowed to set up Panchayat Sanchar Sewa Kendra to provide sale of stamps and stationery, booking of registered articles, delivery of unaccountable articles in the village, and facility for small savings schemes.

A target of 250 Panchayat Sanchar Sewa Kendras has been set for the year 1996-97.

Abolition of Child Labour

*315. SHRI KRISHAN LAL SHARMA : Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state :

(a) whether despite constitutional provisions and fresh emphasis on abolition of child labour, they continue to be employed in hazardous industries of the country;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the number of children employed in such industries has come down since then;

(d) if so, the facts thereof; and

(e) the steps taken or proposed to be taken to remove child labour atleast from hazardous industries?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR (SHRI M. ARUNACHALAM) : (a) to (e). According to 1981 census, the total child labour population in India was 13.06 million. This figure rose to 17.02 million on the basis of the 43rd round of National Sample Survey conducted in 1987-88. The bulk of child labour is engaged in agriculture, and allied employments including household occupations. Out of the total child labour population, around 2.00 million children are estimated to be employed in hazardous occupations and processes. There is no data available to indicate that the incidence of child labour in hazardous occupations has come down.

Government has taken several steps to tackle the problem of child labour. According to the National Child Labour Policy, 1987 the problem of child labour is being tackled through (i) legislation; (ii) general development programmes for the benefit of children; and (iii) implementation of the National Child Labour Projects.

A comprehensive law, namely, the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986 already exists to prohibit the employment of children in 7 occupations and 18 processes. In addition, for safeguarding the interests of children, thee are protective provisions in various other labour laws such as the Factories Act, 1948, the Mines Act, 1952 and Motor Transport (Workers) Act 1961 etc. The approach of the government is to implement all the child related provision of these laws in a harmonious fashion.

Government is presently engaged in the task of rehabilitation of about 2.00 million working children in hazaradous occupations by the year 2002. So far 76 child labour projects have been sanctioned to cover over 1.5 lakh children through special schools where they are provided non-formal education, vocational training, supplementary nutrition, health care and stipend etc. Apart from this, a massive awareness generation campaign has also been launched against the evil of child labour at national, regional and district levels. Funds for district levels awareness generation have been released to 133 most child labour endemic districts in this country to sensitize people against the practice of child labour. These measures will be consolidated and expanded in the coming years.

Consumer Courts and Redressal Forum

*316. SHRI SANAT KUMAR MANDAL : Will the Minister of CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state :

(a) whether any assessment has been made by the Union Government at any stage into the effectiveness and working of the Consumer Courts as the redressal forums for consumers grievances all over the country;

(b) if so, the outcome thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF FOOD AND MINISTER OF CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI DEVENDRA PRASAD YADAV) : (a) to (c). The monitoring/assessment of the functioning of the Consumer Courts is an on going process. According to the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986, the administrative control of the Consumer Courts lies with the respective State Governments/UT Administrations.

The Central Government also monitors the functioning of the Consumer Courts in the States and UTs from time to time. The Central Government had sponsored a sample survey on the "Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Implementation of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986" in five States, namely, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Maharashtra, conducted by the Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi. The summary Report of the Survey submitted in December, 1994 made, inter-alia, certain suggestions for improving the functioning of Consumer Courts, Consumer education and awareness. Some of the recommendations included the provision of infrastructure facilities as well as uniform staffing pattern in the Consumer Courts, authorisation of the Presidents of the District Fora as Drawing & Disbursing Authority and bringing the expenditure of the consumer courts under Plan grant etc. Since these recommendations pertained to the administration and management of consumer courts, the Report was sent to the States and UTs for taking appropriate action.

With a view to enabling the States/UT Governments to strengthen the Consumer courts and also to reduce the pendency of cases in these courts, the Central Government has commenced a central scheme of one time grant to States/UTs under which Rs.61 crores will be made available during 1995-96 and 1996-97. A sum of Rs.29.98 crores has been released during 1995-96 and the release of the balance amount will depend on the extent of reduction in the pendency of cases in the consumer courts.

Over-Billing of Telephones

*317. SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE :
SHRI AMAR ROY PRADHAN :

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :

(a) whether the complaints of over-billing of STD/ISD/PCOs have come to the notice of the Government during 1995 and 1996 (till date);